



Sam Brownback

UNITED STATES SENATOR ■ KANSAS

303 Hart Senate Office Building • Washington DC 20510 • (202) 224-8950

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

News Release

September 29, 1999

CONTACT ERIK HOTMIRE

WORKPLACE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ACT INTRODUCED TODAY

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback today spoke at a news conference with U.S. Sen. John Kerry to introduce the Workplace Religious Freedom Act.

"Today I am pleased to stand with concerned colleagues, both Republicans and Democrats, as well as concerned citizens, including Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Sikhs among many other faiths," Brownback said. "We come together in support of a simple proposition. America is distinguished internationally as a land of religious freedom. It should be a place where no person is forced to choose between keeping their faith and keeping their job. That is why I am joining with Senators Kerry, Hutchinson, Lieberman, and Mikulski in introducing the Workplace Religious Freedom Act.

"This legislation provides a skilled reconciling of religion in the workplace. It recognizes that work and religion can be reconciled without undue hardship. Americans continue to be a religious people, with a deep personal faith commitment. With this commitment comes personal religious standards which govern personal activity. For example, some Americans don't work on either Saturday or Sunday because their faith convictions call for a Sabbath day to be set aside as holy.

"Similarly, some Americans need to wear a skullcap to work, or a head covering, or a turban. As a nation whose great strength rests in diversity, surely we can protect such diverse yet simple and unobtrusive expressions of personal faith. Surely we're still generous enough, and God-respecting enough as a nation, to support others in the genuine expressions of their faith.

"Historically, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act was meant to address conflicts between religion and work. On its face it requires employers to 'reasonably accommodate' the religious needs of their employees as long as this does not impose an 'undue hardship' on the employer. The problem is that our federal courts have essentially read these lines out of the law by ruling that any hardship is an undue hardship. This is not right, nor does it hold with the spirit of this great nation which was founded as a refuge for religious freedom.

"The Workplace Religious Freedom Act will re-establish the principle that employers must try to accommodate the religious needs of employees. This legislation is carefully crafted and strikes an appropriate balance between religious accommodation, while ensuring that an undue burden is not forced upon American businesses. It is flexible and case-oriented.

"America is a great nation because we honor the free exercise of belief, which includes the precious, fundamental freedom of religion. This liberty, known as the 'first freedom,' is worthy of our continued vigilance. It properly demands support from all quarters, both the public and private sectors. This legislation re-establishes the proper balance between the concerns of business and faith," Brownback said.